Anna Wilson

Final

In the spring semester of 2010 I took Eng-L 352 with Professor Jane Schultz. We were assigned to read *The Age of Innocence.* I had a long time disdain of Edith Wharton ever since high school when we spent a whole semester on her work and had to write a ten page paper on her. But I knew that *The Age of Innocence* is one of those great American pieces of literature that every student should read, so I tried to keep an open mind. At the time that the paper for the book was due, I was distracted by family matters. My dad was really sick and in the hospital. I missed the class that proceeded the class period that our papers were due, because I was asked to come home to see my dad. I hate the feeling of missing class because I always think that some major discussion or event happens when I miss it. I had not communicated with anyone about what was said in the class that I had missed, so I just showed up with my paper.

I was flustered when I got to class. I felt that the paper that I was required to hand in was not at all my best work. I couldn’t focus on the subject, I was behind on the reading, and I was distracted by my personal life when I was trying to write it. I didn’t even take the time to proof read the whole thing. I didn’t want to turn it in.

When it finally came time to turn in our papers a debate broke out about the due date. Some of my peers said that my professor had extended the date to the next class period. After some discussion and a change of plans, Prof. Schultz decided to let us turn the paper in on the following class without any loss of points. I was ecstatic.

Things didn’t lighten up for me between the two class periods, and I didn’t have time to rework my paper. When I returned to class I have the exact same copy of the paper that I left with the class before, and I was even more uneasy about it. Now not only did I have a crummy paper, I had a crummy paper that I had gotten and extension on. I turned it into my professor and waited to get my marks.

Professor Schultz started class by saying how disappointed she was with this batch of papers. She talked about how great a text we had to work with and how most of us missed the mark. She said our ideas lacked originality and that these were the overall weakest papers we had turned in as a class. My heart sank into the bottom of my stomach. I had never received a grade lower than a B on a college paper.

As soon as I got my paper I turned to the back to see my mark. I got an A. I didn’t understand why I got an A. I sat in class the whole period thumbing through my paper reading my teachers marks. My paper didn’t seem any better to me than it had before.

After class I asked my professor why I received the grade I did. I told her that I thought my thesis was choppy and that I didn’t fulfill it the way my paper demanded. She told me that my paper drew the most original connection out of everyone’s in the class. She told me that my argument was solid and presented and idea that she hadn’t come across. Then she commended me on my ability to focus on an abstract idea and support it fully with the text.

I was shocked. I honestly didn’t believe that my paper was good. This was the first college level course that I had taken that required me to interpret literature. I felt like the weak link in the class from the very first day. Once I finished the book then reread my paper and I was amazed at the lines I was able to draw. I talked to my teacher and saw my marks I realized that I shouldn’t doubt my writing voice. I had something to say and I said it, no matter how different it was from what everyone else was writing.

Since then I have become a more confident writer. I can walk into new classrooms knowing that I got an A in Prof. Schultz’ class, that is not an easy thing to do, and feel up to the challenge of whatever the semester may bring. Sometimes I am able to read a text and create lines that other people just don’t see. I struggled with this in other classes because my writing voice didn’t sound like anyone else’s. Prof. Schultz applauded my ability to make strong connections and encouraged me to keep it up. She actually gave me and Gummy Award for my wit and verve at the end of the year. Professor Schultz’s class was the hardest writing course I’ve encountered so far, but it also the course that I learned the most about myself and my writing style in. I never thought that I could write a good analysis paper or dissect literature to its core elements, but now I do it without thinking about it. I got an A in the course.